


Occasional Poems



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HENRY CUST



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OCCASIONAL POEMS BY HENRY CUST

Born October 10th 1861

Died March 2 1917

Chosen by N. C. and R. S.

There are vacancies which only
silences may dare to inhabit, which
set, to those whose very own they
are, give out a flood of music all
life long .

H. C. February 1917.

JERUSALEM 1918.

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ENING

ey grows the glimmer of an April even
 d, as the sunset glory fades away,
 ere comes to float upon the clouds to Heaven,
 The burden of the day.

shed are the birds: save that their wakeful leader
 gins the silence silently to break,
 om the dark shelvings of the darkening cedar
 Across the low-lit lake.

d distant chimes, on that full air delaying,
 gentle cadence swell a softened sigh,
 d the far voices of the children playing
 Harmoniously reply.

d slow ascends the burden of creation,
 e dimly dying tract of western fire,
 ngs of rejoicing, tears of lamentation,
 A firmament's desire.

e widow's cry, that flings to God above her
 e words of promise that his love hath given,
 d the lost longings of a lonely lover
 That scorn the help of Heaven.

e dumb despairing of an orphan's sorrow,
 at living lays his life beneath the sod,
 d that alone which shares all human sorrow,
 A humbled trust in God.

So slowly rises 'mid the softened splendour
Of dewborn darkness ominously furled,
The lowly agony of man's surrender,
The voices of the world.

Ah, those sad longings, never to be granted!
Bring they not back the old resistless flow
Of those tear-watered memories we planted
A little year ago?

But hush! the gathering shadows now have banished
The golden splendours that but yet we saw:
And, with the world's — the sunset glories vanished
Are found again no more.

Eton, 1879.

AUER IN WECHSEL

I

an and shaken autumn woods,
 afless autumn weather,
 one the graces, gone the goods,
 autumn altogether.

le autumn fallows sigh,
 uitless, dull, apart;
 aden autumn in the sky,
 autumn in my heart.

one the springtime, gone the strife-time,
 ach first passionate goal;
 tter autumn of one life-time,
 autumn of a soul.

II

idden comes a shiny June day
 hat is this? and where?
 Why does twilight leap to noonday?
 ell me . . . ? She is there.

ack to summer, back to spring-time,
 ack the white dawn air,
 ack the blamelessness and ring-time,
 ow that — She is there.

conies are pouring purple,
 inks incense the air,
 oses, lilies, all at her pull —

O the gladness ! O the madness !
 O the rifled air !
 Ah . . . that sudden shiver of sadness . .
 Is she really there ?

This pure perfect iris vision,
 This diviner air,
 Is it but the old derision . . . ?
 Just the old despair . . .

Autumn, you bedraggled scoundrel,
 Go away, get out !
 Else you'll deep and deeper down drill
 Heart-holes — make me doubt.

III

What ? It's Winter come already ?
 Joy one bears the pain of . . .
 I can still be stalwart, steady —
 Nothing to complain of.

Only it is hard to bear,
 Thinking of the past of it ;
 Hard to say good-bye, my Dear,
 Hard to feel the last of it.

If betwixt the live and dead
 I should never see you,
 Blessings on your darling head
 That you just could be you.

SEPARATION

There's thousands of miles of country,
and thousands of leagues of sea,
and myriad men and women
that separate you and me.

For each is the gain of the struggle,
for each is the pain of the loss,
I'm wondering up at the Pleiads,
and you at the Southern Cross.

We talked to you now for an hour;
you've listened — my heart can tell;
and I hold your hand for a moment —
dear love, it shall yet be well.

DISTANCE

You pray to-night, I know, for me,
You kneel beneath the straining spars,
Between unfathomable sea,
And undiscoverable stars.

And all the unsounded waste beneath,
And all the unbounded vast above,
Are lesser wonder than the breath
That breathed the prayer of such a love.

And all the soundless, boundless roll
Of years that claim and change and chain,
Is less eternal than the soul
That dares and bears that sacred pain.

AN OBSERVATION

You would not know the brown thatch now,
 So grey the years have grown it;
Your love had kept it bright enow,
 If only you had shown it.

You would not know the blue eyes now,
 So dim the tears have made them;
They well had danced and glanced, I trow,
 If but your love had bade them.

You would not know the sad heart now.
 That leapt so at your greeting:
Yet you have listened long ago,
 And blessed it for its beating.

You would not know the hard mouth now,
 Nor words that wander from it, or
The warm close kiss you used to miss,
 So low is my thermometer.

You would not know the forehead now.
 Nor all that homed within it;
Only a kinkled, wrinkled brow,
 Though your least word would win it.

Your voice still wins to all it can,
 Your sweet smile softens some eye:
You and the others took a man,
 And made a mizzzy mummy.

NEARER, MY GOD

"Nearer, my God, to Thee," you sang to-day;
 The great dome trembled to your passionate breath:
 Happy — who seek'st not but to find a way
 Nearer to Death.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee" — but there are some
 Who one discomforting watch of life must keep,
 Whose only dream is wake, and once to be
 Nearer to Sleep.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee" — yet there were days
 Love turned glad eyes around, and not above,
 And sold my soul to win my dear love's praise,
 Nearer to Love.

"Nearer, my God, to Thee;" bow down to me,
 Me, who such waste and wandering ways have trod.
 Love, lead me also at the last to be
 Nearer to God.

A LITTLE MONTH

While through dead woods dead fires of Autumn creep,
 And flowers are fallen, and blrds have ceased to sing,
 A fair first blossom in his May of Spring

Fell on the Winter of Eternal Sleep.

Live Springs sow seeds, but dying Autumns reap
 Harvest: and misery-memory thoughts that cling
 Closer than motherhood, at the last shall bring
 Harvest of heart in heaven to those that weep.

Only the watch and wait are weary-long,
 And sad eyes see not what glad eyes have seen,
 And dead is dead, and what is dead is dear.

Lift up thy heart, let dear love right the wrong,
 Turning the thought of things that might have been
 Tender, by thinking of the things that were.

this little head

Dark wings are beating :

t this little bed

Life and Death meeting:

Sudden in dusk of death

And strangled choke of pain,

The bright death quivers,

Touches the springs of breath,

And, where graves gloomed beneath,

Young life flows back again

In sunny rivers.

SURGE

Flickering shadow cast by the crest of a surging billow,
Flinging from its forehead, flying from the foam;
Keeping live its utmost, trusting to its pillow,
Curls the thunder over, drowns it far from home.

Flickering lovelight cast into eyes by the eyes believed in,
Flashing to the forehead, flying in the breath:
Lightning gashing scar by a soul that a soul's deceived in
Surge of drowning sorrow, yearning it were death.

WARTE NUR, BALDE

Calamity hath brought me very low,
Dressed me in desolation, hate and scorn:

The lilies dear life grew

Stink in a putrid stew.

Yet wait I, looking through the long night's woe,
For one day's dawn.

The righteous round their eyes and mouths aghast:
White sepulchres flush rosy red with scorn:

Each burgess of Gomorrah

Lifts holy hands of horror;

I'll watch their faces when the dark is past,
On that day's dawn.

In the last darkness of the long black hours,
The oath of patience yet all unforsworn,

The face I love will come,

The voice no more be dumb,

The thorn-crown blow a coronet of flowers,
And that day dawn.

TO A PORTRAIT

Beautiful Face !

Is your heart broken that you look so sad ?

Is there no heart of earth that once made glad

Your heart, to hearten yet your flower of grace ?

Is God untender toward you ? Or can Man,

Loving such dear eyes,

Or, save despairing

For too much caring,

Grudge his uncrownedness in the race he ran,

And squandered life and loved and lost the prize !

They pay the worthiest cost,

Whose lives for you were lost.

THE EIGHTH POINT

O Little face of heaven,

O Little heart of hell,

If all love's sins were seven,

You've made me sin them well :

Sin well and suffer greatly,

And still to grace my state,

You've scored your eighth point lately,

And taught me how to hate.

AMICTUS AMORIS

About the perfect body of my love

A vesture clings, wherefrom no force may free her ;
 Tho' she stood naked to the stars above,
 Even so you should not see her.

The invisible fragranee breathing round the rose, —

The infrangible warmth that will not leave the fire, —
 The losing that to loving elings so close —
 So clings my love's attire.

It covers every precious part of her,

It holds her dear dark hair within its hood :
 Her eyes look thro' it : with it where'er she stir
 Her little feet are shod.

She may not set it off for any stress,

Nor night nor day ; yet naught of earth may soil
 The first fair freshness of that angel-dress,
 Nor tears, nor time, nor toil.

No holy priest absolving for his Lord,

No mightiest monarch to his throne ascending,
 No martyr maiden, kneeling to the sword,
 Wears so divine a lending.

Yet all that radiant raiment of my love,

No questing sight, nor touch, shall e'er discover ;
 For warp and woof, the web is woven of
 The kisses of her lover.

N NOBIS, DOMINE.

unto us, O Lord,
unto us the rapture of the day,
peace of night, or love's divine surprise,
h heart, high speech, high deeds, 'mid honouring eyes
at Thy word
these are taken away.

unto us, O Lord ;
us Thou givest the scorn, the scourge, the scar,
ache of life, the loneliness of Death,
insufferable sufficiency of breath.
with thy sword
u piercest very far.

unto us, O Lord ;
, Lord, but unto her be all things given.
light, and life, and earth, and sky be blasted,
let not all that wealth of ~~love~~ be wasted ;
Hell afford
pavement of her Heaven.

*ET DEDIT EIS PETITIONEM IPSORUM ET MISIT
SATURITATEM IN ANIMAS EORUM*

PS. CVI. 15

'Tis well, 'tis well, in the lowest hell,
And I laugh at the lick of the fire ;
The flame roars up in its brimstone cup,
And it *lives* what lies on the pyre.
They've done their worst for the man they cursed,
They've made damnation dire ;
But they can't undo the joy I knew
When I knew my Heart's Desire.

There's one will scream, and one blaspheme,
As they writhe in the molten mire,
And curse the earth that gave them birth,
And damn their dam and their sire,
It pleases the devils to watch their revels,
But I wake the devils to ire,
When I burst into rhyme at the thought of the time
When I found my Heart's Desire.

They wrench my back on a red-hot rack,
They comb my nerves with wire,
They poison with pain the blood of my brain,
Till the devils of devilry tire ;
They spit from above on the name of my Love ;
They call my Love a liar,
But they can't take away the dream of the day,
When I won my Heart's Desire.

So here in hell it is all very well,
 And I'm snug as a beast in a byre;
 The devils are beat by the thought of my Sweet,
 And I don't propose to retire.
 And blood scalds skin where the flame bites in,
 But I like the warmth of the fire:
 For it burns me through with the heat I knew
 When I held my Heart's Desire.

O Heart's Desire, who art not by my side,
 Whose Love, so sweetly lived, so strangely died,
 Thro' faltering, falseness, failure, and the fire,
 Be still for ever all my Heart's Desire.

Arridet nobis lectio Hebraica maciem.

TO LO-BENGULA

ON HIS REDEMPTION FROM SLAVERY, HIS THIRD BIRTHDAY,

AND THE OCCASION OF HIS APPROACHING MARRIAGE.

Burst from the bondage of a brigand tomb,
 Thou comest — Alcestis-wise — from Bethnal Green,
 O rare I o-Ben! — what day yon sun has seen
 Two cycles since thy summons from the womb.
 Our mined hearts are full: yet there is room
 Even so, to meditate thy marriage-queen.
 And — like the Thane of Cawdor's — 'cross the scene,
 Horrid, thy awful generations loom.

Thou heritor of hideousness divine,
 Now thro' thy pulses peals the passionate pain
 Which Shakspeare knew, which Goethe: there shall be
 Wonderful things made new, a lordly line,
 Waking eternal ugliness again.
 Of little loathsome loved Lobengula.

His Bull-Dog, stolen and recovered.

Here lies
that head and heart of dearness
POPSY BOO
who
in splendid faithful following of his master's example
the joy of life, the heart of love
worshipped by master, mistress, and children
died in a mist of tears

1991

"Who travels now through all that shadowy way"
"From which no sparrow comes again, they say."

Ever faithful and following
He loved much and sinned much
But every sin and love he decorated.
Bland suave and prudent
He was blind to a multitude of things he saw and
deaf to a larger multitude of things he heard
and
by his fortunate faculty
of barking at the right moment
he not infrequently saved
the fortunes of the family.
who consecrate
this tribute

THE IMMORTAL END

Not in the upland lawns of mind,
Not by the Syrian stream,
But in low trodden tracks we find
The vision and the gleam.

Though rock-o'erhung and burden-bowed
Man sees in faint and fasting,
Blue sky is more than all the cloud
And very much more lasting.

It matters not what life we spend,
What anguish we inspire,
So there be one immortal end
To one immense desire.

So that, without one finest fleck,
'Thro' fire and wrath and rods,
Incense not insult shall bedeck
The falseness of our gods.

THE DARK

When we are locked in stones away,
 With all death's dark between,
 Will that which then they'll call our clay
 Think of what might have been ?

What shall I meet at spirits' tryst,
 What will the moonlight bring ?
 A shining shape of amethyst,
 Or just an ugly Thing ?

Down in the darkness shall we dream,
 Or will even dreams be done,
 Of love, and passion, and the gleam
 Of what was once our sun ?

A sun whose shining never failed,
 Whose light was never dim,
 But only seemed at seasons veiled.
 Because we clouded him.

Then once be wake, and clutch the dark,
 And fight the choking breath.
 "O Christ ! why did I ?" Then a spark
 Of blinding thought — and death.

A FRAGMENT

I have a little white thing wonderful
Untamed unchained as sea or sky . . .
But the sun and the salt of both tiding the river,
Both arrow light, amazing and radiant,
So that thought, sun and flesh are only one,
That one which keeps creation in its hands
And makes life beautiful and clean and whole. . .

LIFE'S SONG

Ah, Life, is this Thy song :

Endure and die . . . ?

Still strive with pain and wrong

As true hearts strove :

Till Love and Truth and Pureness, which are strong.

Death's self disprove.

Ah Life, Thy crowning song

Is crowning Love.

Where can you reap so white a harvest as in this wan troop of men: lives divinely appointed with hearts to feel, with brains to conceive, with hands to execute, who perish broken, desolate ... It may be, though the World knows it not, that they have seen what many prophets and kings have desired to see and have not seen it; that they have followed the gleam: and that their eyes have seen in every wave of wind upon the wheat the trailing of the skirts of those whose faces see GOD , , ,

Every where and every day there will be amongst the living the others of their generation — a fellowship of presences, some dim, some shining, but presences never to be wholly put away -- plucking at their hearts, flooding sometimes their memories, seeming sometimes to touch their hands, masterful sometimes to govern and to save their souls. There will be a sort of national Golden Treasury, sacred and serene, in to which men and women will enter at their need to find new faith, new courage, and unfathomed inexhausted consolation...

(H. C. 1916)



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